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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 003417

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VISIT TO MAKESHIFT ROHINGYA CAMPS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b),(d)

1. (SBU) On July 15, poloff accompanied a delegation of eight donor country diplomats to visit makeshift Rohingya refugee camps near the city of Teknaf to emphasize to local officials the importance of improving the situation of the 200,000 plus estimated Rohingya refugees living in squalor outside of the official UNHCR refugee camps.

2. (C) The EU ambassador as well as the resident UNHCR representative questioned Shahjahan Chowdhury, local BNP MP, as to why no progress has been made since their last joint visit in December 2004 to move the 12,000 people from the Domdomia Kerontoli makeshift settlement to a better location for improved living conditions. Highlighting the monsoon season's ability to destroy Domdomia Kerontoli due to its low lying location close to bodies of water, the EU ambassador expressed frustration at the lack of action on behalf of the BDG even after repeated promises from the ministerial level and PMO's office on down.

3. (SBU) Local officials cited HIV/AIDS health concerns, high rates of sex workers amongst the community, and lack of response from their offices in Dhaka as explanations for the unchanging location of the makeshift settlement. MP Chowdhury claimed that the people in Domdomia Kerontoli did not want to move to another location because it would be too inconvenient for their fishing livelihoods. When asked, residents were reluctant to say whether or not they favored relocation, only that they wanted peaceful and harmonious lives.

4. (C) According to a written UNHCR assessment, "There are clear signs that the government has no intention to solve the problems and to continue to use this small group of refugees for political and personal gains."

5. (C) Comment: The exchange with local officials in Teknaf underscores the lack of BDG political will to improve the living conditions of Rohingyans in and out of the refugee camps.
CHAMMAS